

# **Changing the Order of BOLCII and BOLCIII**

By 2LT Eric Schweser

Van Deman Final Paper

November 13, 2008

The U.S. Army's Basic Officer Leadership Course (BOLC) II mission is "To develop competent, confident and adaptable Lieutenants, grounded in warrior tasks, able to lead Soldiers in the contemporary operating environment."<sup>1</sup> The contemporary operating environment (COE) after 9/11 dictated a change in officer training from a post-Cold War model to a model that incorporated COE and the Army concept of full spectrum operations. Figure 1 shows the Officer Education System (OES) Transformation from a brief given to members of Congress on the creation of the Army's BOLC concept.<sup>2</sup> The timeline shows how the Army moved from a larger conventional force to the current Army structure. BOLC II meets the needs of training new officers in the current operational environment, however the chronological order of placing BOLC II or a "tough, standardized, graduate-level leadership experience"<sup>3</sup> before new officers attend and complete their respective BOLC III or branch training fails to effectively prepare new

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<sup>1</sup> "BOLC Information Briefing 17APR2007" Retrieved from <https://www.us.army.mil/suite/folder/953127>

<sup>2</sup> "BOLC Briefing for Members of Congress" NDI. Retrieved from <https://www.us.army.mil/suite/folder/953127>

<sup>3</sup> LTG (R) Stroup, "BOLC Update Briefing", NDI. Retrieved from <https://www.us.army.mil/suite/folder/953127>

Army officers for the COE. BOLC II should occur after BOLC III (branch-qualifying schools) under the OES in order to effectively prepare new Army lieutenants for the rigors and challenges they will face as officers in the U.S. Army.

### **BRIEF HISTORY OF BOLC CONCEPT**

An Army Training and Leadership Development Panel (ATLDP) in 2003 developed the BOLC II concept because of the identification of several initial leadership deficiencies in new

Fig. 1: OES Transformation Timeline

Army officers. The ATLDP identified four specific areas that the Army needed from new officers<sup>4</sup>:

1. New 2LTs lack combined arms perspective and an Army service ethic
2. Need a common Army standard for small unit leadership
3. Need to develop young officers who are confident and competent to lead small units in a full spectrum environment
4. Need more hands-on, performance oriented field training

A BOLC II training pilot program began at Ft. Benning, GA in July 2005 followed by full implementation at Ft. Sill, OK and Ft. Benning in the summer of 2006<sup>5</sup>. Since full implementation, BOLC II remains a training requirement for all new Army officers prior to attending their respective BOLC III or branch-qualifying training. Judging the success of BOLC II in preparing new Army officers for the challenges of leading as new lieutenants is difficult based on the short existence of BOLC II. However, the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) conducted a survey of Army Company (CO) and Battalion (BN) commanders in the

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<sup>4</sup> “BOLC Concept Approved for Implementation 4Q06 By the CSA, 04FEB2003” Retrieved from <https://www.us.army.mil/suite/folder/953127>

<sup>5</sup> “BOLC Information Briefing 17APR2007” Retrieved from <https://www.us.army.mil/suite/folder/953127>

Multi-National District (MND)-Baghdad in April 2008. Figure 2 shows the survey questions asked of the commanders.<sup>6</sup>

Fig. 2: CALL MND-B Survey Questions

The Figure 3 chart of CALL survey responses to the first question indicates a generally positive response by commanders regarding BOLC II-completed officers and their leadership skills.

Fig. 3: CALL MND-B Question 1 Results

The Figure 4 chart indicated that commanders felt their BOLC II graduate 2LT's possessed lower combat readiness skills than leadership skills.

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<sup>6</sup> "BOLC Common Core Task Review, 01-04APR2008" Retrieved from <https://www.us.army.mil/suite/folder/953127>

Fig. 4: CALL MND-B Question 2 Results

The Figure 5 survey results should be used as the best indication of how commanders feel about BOLC II graduate 2LT's. The third question compares non-BOLC officers vs. BOLC-graduate officers. If a significant difference in positive opinion existed between the commanders' survey answers then it could be concluded that BOLC II delivers a positive training experience for new Army officers. However, according to the results, more commanders answered that no measureable difference existed between BOLC II graduate officers and non-BOLC II officers.

Fig. 5: CALL MND-B Question 3 Results

### **BOLC II Issues/Solutions**

A lack of available assignments at either BOLC II or BOLC III causes many new Army officers to either wait at their respective commissioning sources or be sent to BOLC II or BOLC III as a hold-over or hold-under. Although the assignment of thousands of new officers each year poses a logistical problem in terms of training schedules and available billets, assigning newly commissioned officers as hold-overs or hold-unders at BOLC II inefficiently deals with available personnel. Newly commissioned officers should be sent to their respective branch schools first to either attend BOLC III (number would have to be changed under this proposal) or remain at their branch school bases and serve as an officer that could assist the lower-enlisted AIT company commanders. Not only will this provide each AIT company with added personnel for training, but it will also give the new 2LT valuable leadership experience and a better understanding of the enlisted/officer relationship.

The current order of BOLC II and BOLC III training does not put emphasis on ensuring newly-commissioned officers receive their branch qualifications. The priority of the Army should first ensure that every newly commissioned officer passes their respective branch training before issuing requirements for follow-on training. BOLC II training does not branch-qualify any new officer that attends training.

The most important reason to changing the order of BOLC II and BOLC III training involves the original intent of BOLC II. According to a memorandum distributed by the Commanding General of Accessions Command on “BOLC Policy and Guidance”, one of BOLC II’s major goals “is to imbue lieutenants with the Warrior Ethos while ensuring they develop trust and confidence in their cohorts from other branches, BOLC II classes will have a mix of students by branch, component, source, gender, and will represent combat arms, combat support, and combat service support branches.”<sup>7</sup> The combined nature of BOLC II classes in theory would provide a joint environment in which officers from different branches train together. Unfortunately, unless the new 2LT is prior-service and has experience in their particular branch, the branch of a new officer at BOLC II becomes irrelevant since no officer is branch-qualified yet. In order to truly follow the intent of BOLC II in a “combined branch” environment, new officers should become branch-qualified first then use their experience at their respective Officer Basic Course (OBC).

The U.S. Army should send new 2LT’s to BOLC II after attending their respective branch training to improve the overall effectiveness of BOLC II training and ensure new 2LT’s receive their proper branch training. The overall concept of BOLC II grew from recognizing the OES must transform to match the COE. However, the most effective way to ensure new Army officers are adaptable to the COE prior to being assigned to their units would be to test the skills of a newly-branched 2LT in a “combined branch” training event such as BOLC II. Utilizing hold-over/hold-under 2LT’s, more efficiently, placing priority on branch qualification before any other training, and ensuring new officers have the experience necessary to contribute to “combined branch” training suggest the need to switch and therefore renumber BOLC training.

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<sup>7</sup> “US Army Accessions Memorandum on BOLC Policy and Guidance” 24APR2008. Retrieved from <https://www.us.army.mil/suite/folder/953127>



